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ABSTRACT

The rural population of Chile has been served poorly by the formal educational system, rural educational attainment lags behind that of urban areas, and outmigration and alienation of rural youth are high. In the past decade, popular education has attempted to educate rural people and put them in control of their destinies by drawing on popular knowledge and culture and giving them a critical orientation. The education and self-expression program for peasant communities originated around 1985 in Chiloe (southern Chile) where most of the inhabitants are Huilliches, an indigenous people. Within the program, 17 groups of small rural landholders discussed concrete themes and problems of everyday life; organized themselves to settle problems; and communicated aspects of this process of reflection, discussion, and organization through a radio program and a bimonthly bulletin. The radio program developed a large audience that responded to broadcasts by mail, recounting their own community activities and discussing or expanding on program themes. Such communication is an integral part of the process of developing a critical consciousness, refining a world view, and transforming it into a basis for action. Several elements that are related to horizontal multilateral communication are increased self-esteem, valuing the spoken word, valuing personal experience and culture, development of a group spirit, and emphasis on collective learning. These elements reinforce the group in its collective problem-solving actions. (SV)

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Chapter 21

POPULAR EDUCATION FOR PEASANT COMMUNITIES IN CHILE

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THE MARGINALIZATION OF THE RURAL AREAS OF CHILE

Although illiteracy rates are generally low in Chile owing to expanded education for children, the rural areas have a significant proportion of illiterate people. The overall illiteracy rate is 5.3% for adults.¹ In the urban areas, the adult illiteracy rate is only 3.3%, but in the rural areas it is 13.7%.

Illiteracy and lack of education are associated with poverty. The average level of education for the 15-24 age group is 10 years of schooling; in low-income sectors of the population, it is nine years in urban areas and seven years in rural areas. Among more affluent sectors, education levels for the same age group are nearly 13 years in urban areas and nearly 11 in rural areas.

The differences are particularly marked among older adults. For example, adults between 35 and 44 who have a high income have almost twice as much education as those who have a low income, especially in rural areas. In these areas, those with the lowest incomes have only 5.4 years of education and those with high incomes have almost 11 years.

Though there have been gradual improvements in the education system, rural schools do not have the capacity to provide adequate education to this sector of the population. Some of these schools have only one teacher, others do not give all courses. Their curriculum is that of Chilean basic primary schools and, while these schools are allowed to adjust course content to the situation of their pupils, most of the time they only curtail it. The result of all this is a school that cannot develop the same skills as urban schools, or meet the requirements

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of children in rural environments.

One of the most serious problems is certainly the way in which the education system ignores the characteristics of the rural population. The language, standards and curriculum are developed in the realm of symbolic representations that have been formalized into a specific code that is totally different from that of the neglected rural sectors. Not only is it different, it also originates with the dominant culture, which is usually that of the urban sectors.

This results in the serious inadequacy of teaching processes and learning strategies in the case of children from rural sectors, which stems from differences between these cultural codes. Schools thus communicate and foster social differentiation that influences the educational backwardness of the forgotten children of rural areas.

Illiteracy and low levels of education cause adults to have very poor self-esteem. The way in which education is associated with the transmission of codes validated in a certain way by society underlies this problem of low self-esteem. This negative self-image contributes to hindering the processes of education and organization for the purpose of improving living conditions in these sectors.

There is certainly more than one "rural culture" in Chile, and there is more than one form of peasant life. The rural population is in fact very diverse, owing to numerous factors, such as geographical location (which determines what is produced), the form of land ownership, and, in particular, the form of productive labour.

Political factors have, moreover, strongly influenced the structure of the countryside and its inhabitants. In the 1960s, there was an agrarian reform initiative in Chile, which was still incomplete when the military coup took place, leaving the peasants with no aid from the state. Worse yet, the organizations that grew out of this reform process were brutally repressed. As a result, they were dismantled and destroyed.

In the first years of the dictatorship, the military government hastened to allocate individual plots of land, without providing the peasants with ownership and administration assistance, which caused many peasants to eventually abandon the land because of indebtedness.

Moreover, the intrusion of large-scale capitalism into the countryside changed the existing systems of production. The technology of capitalism caused polarization among producers; some were able to acquire the technology (by heavily indebting themselves), while others remained marginalized with minimal means of subsistence. The large estates, mainly producing fruit and wood, employ a huge mass of seasonal labourers, relegating many peasants, in particular young people, to their former status as casual labourers and hired workers. Those marginalized by technology and capitalist methods of production have great difficulty getting out of the poverty trap.

Modernity has inexorably penetrated the rural world, although at an uneven pace. When the focus of modern values was restricted to the school, the

traditional culture, with its customs and oral traditions, co-existed with it, perhaps because of the inefficiency of the education system. Now, however, the mass media, bringing a flood of foreign messages, are having an impact on rural areas, particularly among young people.

Moreover, peasants are in contact with several forms of government bureaucracy, from payment of taxes to special subsidies for rural areas. This increasingly complicated environment means, in ways that differ for each area, that peasants require increased writing skills.

The traditional culture, varying from region to region, is not sufficiently valued by young people, who suffer from a considerable degree of cultural rootlessness. Most young people no longer wish to be peasants. Their elders think that the rising generation has lost the spirit of initiative and sacrifice which they themselves had when they were young. Older people often stress the experience of beginning farm work at an early age, which caused them to leave school after only a few years. The fact that young people are receiving more education is seen as a cultural change that is alienating them from their elders and from the land.

All of this is contributing to the influx of young people into the cities, as they seek out better opportunities. However, young people are also migrating, although in smaller numbers, from the urban periphery to rural areas where seasonal work is available. The barriers between urban and rural life are tending to disappear, particularly among young people.

Young people who migrate to the cities have rather poor prospects, since they are unable to compete with those who have been educated in urban schools. Unemployment or low-income employment awaits them, since the labour market has become more demanding: more education is now needed for the same job.

In 1970, for example, 41.2% of heavy machinery operators and labourers had between four and six years of education, whereas all but 14.9% of workers in these categories had more education than this by 1980. The majority of operators and labourers had more education: between seven and ten years.

Occupational categories for those with little education are becoming increasingly rare, but they nonetheless are not disappearing. In 1970, 23.8% of the unemployed had between 4 and 6 years of education, whereas in 1980 only 13.6% of the unemployed had an incomplete education (between four and six years of primary school). The majority of the unemployed (50.9%) has 10 years of education or more.²

Young people who cannot migrate to the cities continue to work on the land. Often angry, they work at various temporary jobs, greatly overworked and without future prospects. They marry young, forming little clusters that survive with the whole family working, reproducing the conditions of rural marginalization.

THE MEANING OF POPULAR EDUCATION IN A RURAL ENVIRONMENT

Faced with this situation, it is worth asking whether the population needs education. On what aspects of rural life should proper education focus?

Attempts have been made to answer this question through educational proposals and activities geared to the rural population. The state has persevered with the standardized system of formal education, adding a few agricultural schools. Some educators, acting individually, have carried out several valuable local projects with the support of an NGO or university.

Beyond the state, the most significant activity for just over the past decade has been popular education, which has attempted to educate people and put them in control of their destinies, with the ability to construct a more just social order.

Popular education projects, in the tradition of "liberation education", are based on popular culture, even when it incorporates major elements of the dominant ideology or when it can be considered a "culture of silence"³, or a spontaneous and traditional culture.⁴ It is assumed that, in a class society, culture is the expression and the embodiment of the social insertion of groups. Since there are many forms of insertion, there are also many cultures giving expression to them.⁵

Popular education proposes to save the core of popular culture and knowledge, through which popular groups identify themselves as such, communicate among each other and interpret their experiences. It should not be assumed that popular knowledge does not exist or that it merely reflects the dominant ideology, but neither is it possible to naively claim non-existent virtues for it. Since popular knowledge derives from life experience on the one hand and the influence of the ruling class on the other, it does not present itself as a systematic and orderly body of knowledge, but rather in a scattered and self-contradictory way.⁶

Popular education tries to make popular knowledge and culture coherent and to give them a critical orientation. It will also carry out activities to preserve specialized popular knowledge in the popular interest, freeing it from ideological distortions. In this way, it is claimed, the people will be able to reformulate humanity's knowledge and cultural heritage on the basis of its world view, thus achieving an authentic cultural synthesis.

Another task of popular education is to preserve history by and for the masses by helping to explain and systematize the collective memory (which already exists in a fragmentary and implicit form).

Using dialogue and participation, popular education projects deal with the main problems of the participants, as identified by investigation and thematic

discussion techniques. Through a process of action and reflection, these projects promote the idea that the participants are able to confront and solve their own problems.

The real-life experiences of participants are always emphasized. Freire's notion of "becoming aware", seen as a first step toward action and organization with a view to solving concrete problems, is less emphasized than before.

In rural regions, numerous programs have been developed, some stressing culture and others farming. A smaller number deal with illiteracy, which is particularly difficult because of the dispersion of rural inhabitants, the age of illiterate people, the shame they feel about their problem, and the lack of written information reaching rural areas.

Literacy education, in the context of popular education, is rooted in the culture of groups and thus interrelates with other activities aimed at the rural population.

EDUCATION & SELF-EXPRESSION PROGRAM FOR PEASANT COMMUNITIES

The education and self-expression program for peasant communities originated between 1983 and 1987 on Isla Grande (Great Island) in Chiloé, 1100 kilometres south of Santiago.⁷ Its general aim was to help peasant communities acquire a critical awareness of their experience, express their perceptions of their surroundings, confront their problems and organize to solve them.

From its inception, the program was closely related to the concept of communication. Its general concern was "the lack of expression and the undervaluing of popular culture in the region and its ongoing invasion by foreign cultural content propagated through the mass media."⁸

To confront this problem, the diocese of Ancud set up a radio transmitter, seeking to provide a means whereby popular groups could communicate and express their culture, Radio Estrella del Mar (starfish radio), as it was called, had a cultural focus, seeking to stimulate an "active and critical attitude, so that people are not taken in by false illusions or by various interests, and so that they can become agents of their own development and have their own organization."⁹

It should be noted that the inhabitants of Chiloé are Huilliche¹⁰ are of mainly Huilliche descent, and have their own rich culture, which has remained more intact than elsewhere because of geographical isolation. The result is that culturally invasive media messages seem to contrast more sharply with aboriginal practices, which exemplify very different viewpoints, values and ideas. For example, several explanations of some social and natural phenomena call on mythological figures or specific customs such as the "minga"¹¹ (voluntary community labour) when moving house, planting or harvesting.

(sharing of goods), and "queclar" ("hospitability), which show a concern for justice and the importance of solidarity among neighbours.

When the program was developed, the importance of the troika of education, communication and organization once more made itself clear. The groups (17 communities of small rural landholders) discussed concrete themes relating to everyday life, organized themselves to settle some of the problems identified and communicated aspects of this process of reflection, discussion and organization through a radio program and a bimonthly bulletin.

The "Voces Campesinas" (peasant voices) radio program, which is broadcast once a week and which is subsequently rebroadcast at the request of the peasants, has a large audience. Beginning as a half-hour program and subsequently expanding to an hour, it had a well-defined structure: first, it broadcast the discussion of a theme, often presented in the form of a radio play and/or interviews, both produced by the facilitators; then it usually presented an interview with an "important" member of the community; community news was then broadcast and, lastly, letters from listeners were read out over the air and answered.

The bulletin of the same name was sent to all the participating communities and circulated within the Red de Prensa Popular (popular press network) that was set up in Chile in the years of the dictatorship.

In this way the process grew through the mass media. It was thus not difficult for other peasants (listeners) to participate in thinking about and discussing a theme from remote locations. The many letters showed the importance of the radio program to peasant groups.

An average of over 30 letters was sent to the program each month in 1986. They mostly recounted community activities. In several cases they discussed or expanded on stories that were broadcast. They could also easily promote cultural expression: during the last months of 1985, a folklore competition was organized, which received 64 entries from various locations. It should be recalled that communication by letter was difficult in this region. Among the hindering factors were low levels of education, the fact that writing was not a habit, isolation and the burden of peasant work. Correspondence thus decreased markedly in the summer peak labour months.

On the basis of ongoing thematic research, materials were developed (simulation kits, helpful brochures) that discussed the community and its problems, health, communication within the family, crops, natural resources, alcoholism and animals. In discussing these topics, the program promoted the adoption of a critical outlook on reality and prompted people to organize themselves to meet various challenges, so as to improve the quality of life. For example, to remedy the lack of health care resources in the countryside, 11 community pharmacies were set up. Community sewing workshops were later set up to provide low-cost clothing. The construction of a greenhouse to provide vegetables during the winter was also important. Seeking to discover their own identity, three communities researched their

own history, noting the challenges they had confronted and the way in which some of their problems developed.

The Program usually worked through facilitators drawn from the communities and elected by them, who had three functions: animation, education and communication. Facilitators were trained in group animation and recording techniques during periodic day-long training sessions. Since the training was of the "earn by doing" sort, the facilitators made recordings, several of them in the form of radio plays on themes they themselves chose; these were later broadcast on the radio program and appeared in the form of short stories in the "Boletín Voces Campesinas" (bulletin of peasant voices).¹⁴

The political and social context in which the project developed created enormous difficulties. In an era of dictatorship in which it was not safe to speak out, peasants were invited to "express themselves" and "make themselves heard" on local radio. Overcoming fear and urging others to do likewise was also an ongoing task of the project. Peasants living in isolated areas were the most easily intimidated.

The project got under way in 1983, a year in which nation-wide protests began in the cities, and especially in the capital, breaking silence in the face of the dictatorship. However, the rural populations in the most remote areas were far from involved in the turmoil. Worse yet, the sudden change in what had become to some extent "usual" circumstances, caused uncertainty and fear among the majority even while the first glimmers of hope were beginning to manifest themselves among the more politicized sectors.

Moreover, lack of communication and participation in the system had created a climate of scepticism and pessimism about accomplishing anything. The economy seemed to be a remote problem over which no control could be exercised.

In these circumstances, an invitation to become organized, to explore features of one's own environment and express them in recordings, could not meet with an enthusiastic reaction. Even so, the constant work with three communities during the pilot phase, the joint development of materials, and the climate of communication and confidence that was created, helped to calm fears and increase credibility, replacing the previous notion that "nothing can be done" with more optimistic sentiments.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

In order to expand on certain aspects of the educational process, it seems appropriate to consider the meaning and the possible effects of communication. The interrelatedness of communication and social structures should be emphasized, especially with respect to the goal of popular education, which is to charge social relations and mobilize popular groups.

In general, in the interaction they develop, people will set up a given system

of relations that can either reproduce (and thus reinforce) existing social structures, or else create small liberating zones, which in turn create the possibility of social change.

The process of developing a critical consciousness, refining a world view and transforming it into a basis for action, develops through a dialogue within the group and with the educator. These horizontal relations are the beginning of the creation of new social structures. These new forms of interaction give rise to a specific language, community customs and new forms of organization of community groups. In several processes of popular education, as groups become more close-knit, it is possible to identify various elements that can be connected, resulting in communication that is more horizontal and multilateral. Here are a few examples:

Increased self-esteem

The process of confronting various specific problems in a community in a group discussion setting reinforces the perception that "we can", "we have worth", and "we are not afraid". The same horizontal interaction gradually lays the foundations for a greater degree of determination in personal projects that will be reinforced by the community.

I think the peasant has not yet been granted enough recognition. What's more, he is a working person... and I think he should respect himself and understand that he is someone of importance. But I think that we the peasants, those in one group at least, are in the process of doing something. We have a program, Voces Campesinas, which is already going somewhere and which will mobilize other peasants.

Valuing the spoken word

It is not a matter of indifference to the group if someone "does not speak". It is important that everyone should "express themselves" on the problem or topic being discussed; everyone contributes in this way to "expressing the world view". This is built up collectively on the basis of each person's vision. Everyone becomes a participant in the situation around them by saying what they have to say.

In the case of the program, speech becomes of major importance, since it is reinforced and expanded by being broadcast over the radio. Expressing the reality of peasant life and being listened to, particularly by the authorities, can help to overcome fear of the dictatorship.

Right now, I think we have a solution, because our complaints and problems are being listened to... Because we are able to do interviews ourselves and see the problems that we have, so that we can let the authorities know what is happening in the countryside, because they often don't know what is going on.... What peasants are most afraid of is to speak out, to tell the truth... I welcome this program very much because in this way the peasant listens to others and our companions [let go of fear].

Valuing personal experience & the distinctive culture

The way in which each person perceives or has experienced a particular problem or theme is important. Experience is accumulated and interpreted on the basis of one's own world view through culture. A program that integrates the goals of publicizing and reinforcing specifically cultural themes is appreciated on both counts. This why the peasants identify deeply with the program. Their recollection of their own vigorous cultural traditions puts them in touch with their own roots, with their identity as a people.

This program has been very useful since it has listened to young people, adults and the elderly, and it has compiled information about our cultural "roots, because people must know how our ancestors lived if they wish to understand themselves.

Development of a group spirit

The totality of group phenomena (customs, language, actions), sustained by shared intentions and values, creates a certain mystique which works to reinforce the group. The individual places special value on his or her connection with the group, distinguishing it from others.

Therefore, what people say in the group or over the radio relates to them, and shows that they appreciate this and see and value it as something distinct, of an almost religious nature.

Because you are part of us and we are part of you, because you unite us more each day, because you are the one we listen to most, because we were allowed to have a program which we needed; our program, where peasants express themselves and discuss their particular anxieties and problems, without neglecting our customs, legends and roots, expressed by mature people who have given their all, who have struggled and who continue to do so... May friendship and recognition of the work of this broadcasting family be the symbol that lets us say: Thank you, thank you, Radio Estrella del Mar.

(greetings from a woman peasant participating in the 1985 anniversary celebrations of Radio Estrella del Mar)

Emphasis on collective learning

Through the sharing of experiences and the contribution of the outside educator, a certain knowledge is developed which is grasped collectively in a "natural" way, since these are aspects of the participants' own lives. The participants observe that this is a different kind of learning in which everyone progresses together.

For me, I think this is a way of advancing by discovering several things which lagged in our communities and which at the same time were improving in different ways. This helps us in expressing ourselves and finding solutions in other fields, such as the

economic, cultural and education fields, and to many more problems which were hidden to us, so to speak, or which we were not aware of.

Bringing about collective projects & organization

The preceding elements reinforce the group in its collective action to settle, even if only partially certain problems around it. The peasants perceive that communication is the first step in organizing to confront their problems and to put pressure on the authorities.

The authorities should listen to the peasants more, so that between the authorities and the farmers, the solutions to the main problems can somehow be found, because if you try to do it alone, it will be very, very difficult to be listened to. This is why I repeat that organization must be the principal element so that peasants' voices can be heard.

What we dealt with most was the family health theme. In discussing things, we began with the problem of the mail, because the mail was in a poor state at that time. . . . and from there the idea of pharmacies was born. Now, thankfully, we have pharmacies. Each associate helps out; one donates paint, another nails, another shelves, and this is how the pharmacy is born, and I think it is also very important for us, above all because we are so isolated from the rest of the people.

The radio programs also helped spur on communities or groups that had not participated in the program for organizing and carrying out collective projects. It thus affected more people than the original radio program, and it received requests from other groups that wished to participate. This is a path along which further progress is possible...

The effects of this type of educational process, stressing communication, which were observable both in the groups closely involved and in the radio program's audience, showed that this process is a path which should be followed, expanded and deepened.

The link between education, group and mass communication has been proven, even in the difficult conditions of a dictatorship, to be a good formula for educational work with peasant groups that need a great deal of support to mobilize themselves and confront concrete problems in a collective and organized manner, so as to improve their quality of life. Written material, including the bulletins published by the peasants and the support manuals developed with their participation, were of great value to those involved with the groups, since they recognized that the printed page remained to be reread in their families, as opposed to the radio program, which was in a way ephemeral. Through the radio programs and the bulletins, it was possible to keep the process perpetually renewing itself. Radio, even more than television in these remote rural areas, proved to be an effective tool of horizontal communication that could give good results in other kinds of educational programs.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATIONAL WORK IN RURAL AREAS

It is undoubtedly more difficult to work with rural groups than urban ones. Isolation (in most cases), the scattered population and apathy, which result in educational programs boycotted by the participants, are some of the problems encountered by educators attempting to work in these areas. Moreover, the diversity of the countryside makes it difficult to develop material that is easily propagated on a large scale. We can almost say that the diversity of the rural population is greater than that of the marginalized people of the cities, since the latter have more points in common.

The rural population varies in terms of geographical location, form of land ownership and type of production; also, the modern world has penetrated the countryside in varying degrees, without entirely destroying peasant roots and customs, which are differentiated at the same time by multiple factors, some of them ethnic. Alongside the "minifundistas" or small landowners, who make relatively good use of a certain level of technology, according to market requirements and their economic possibilities, there are agribusiness workers and seasonal workers who live in conditions similar to those of the "atuerinos"¹⁶ (outsiders) in the first decade of the century.

For these reasons, educational activities in rural areas must take diversity into account and develop specific forms for different sectors of the rural population. Another factor which must be taken into account is the pragmatism of the rural population. If an activity is to be successful, it must deal with the basic needs of popular groups and promote concrete actions in which these groups can become involved, not as recipients, but as agents of improvement of their own living condition^s. Only thus will better participation and commitment to the developing process be obtained, which will convert it into something belonging to them.

Even when activities or themes involving agriculture, health, housing, or other concerns relating to the population's basic needs are being considered, any action must have a strong cultural component, so that the teaching-learning process respects the population's world view and develops on the basis of it. The language of literacy education texts must support and take into account the groups' culture.

Groups should continue to develop their own materials, not only to intensify participation, but also to make sure that groups "write and read their experience." It will therefore be very important to promote the development of texts that preserve customs, legends, stories and real-life accounts. By having these people read and write about what is specific to them, it will be possible to respect, promote and develop the cognitive processes inherent in their culture.

It will thus be possible to at least partially offset the social control that is an aspect of the modernization of the groups' culture.

The link between literacy education and basic necessities will be of major importance in ensuring that quality of life is improved by various means. Any rural literacy education project must take into account the problem of scant and usually poor means of communication; isolation is a common problem. To do this, it is necessary to train the inhabitants of the communities themselves as educational action facilitators, by choosing those who have a particularly important role in setting up the process in the community and determining its links with the culture and basic necessities of the groups. Isolation, the difficulty in reaching many places and the prevalence of oral culture make support to groups through such mass media as radio more effective. Undoubtedly, radio is the mass medium that can best integrate itself into an oral culture. This is probably one of the reasons why it is better accepted than television.

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7. Chiloé is an archipelago made up of the main island surrounded by hundreds of smaller islands. The population of Chiloé is 110,000 people, of whom 80% inhabit rural areas.
8. *El Cide* in 1985. CIDE: Santiago, 1985. p 38.
9. Diocese of Ancud: *El Seminario de la Radio Estrella del Mar* (The path of Radio Estrella del Mar), 1984. (mimeographed).
10. Aboriginal inhabitants of southern Chile.
11. Collective voluntary labour among neighbours. The person needing special assistance provides only food for those helping out.
12. Assistance in cash to a newcomer in the community.
13. The custom of granting hospitality to any neighbour in case of bad weather, especially when on a sea voyage.
14. Over the past two years, some of them were used by the Department of Education in post-literacy texts.
15. In this vein, the contrast with K. Merten's analysis of the concept of communication is interesting. Based mainly on N. Luhman, it proposes the following definition: "[Translation] 'Communication is the smallest social system that has the possibility of temporal, objective and social reflection, which by means of the interaction of the persons communicating, enables the analysis of actions placed inside a larger system, over which it has a great influence; communication is seen as a "core" social system, defining larger social systems. Of all the criteria that define the essence of communication, the most important is the concept of the possibility of reflection, which refers to the reflection of processes upon themselves, and generally implies an increase in their power.'
16. Merten, in the proposed definition, endows communication with the capacity for reflection on three levels: temporal, objective and social. On the temporal level, the possibility of reflection implies that the consequences of communication processes affect communication itself, influencing the evolution of communicative and social structures. This means that, considered from this angle, communication can be seen as a process of generating structures. On the objective level, the possibility of reflection means that the content of communication sustains the process itself. In this sense, communication is a process that deals with facts and events; this is important in developing an objective principle to encompass it and, because of this, in shaping cultural expression. On the social level, the possibility of reflection implies mutual support by the people communicating, in terms of perceptions, expectations, and actions. In this light, communication can be defined as a process of interaction. (Merten K., *Kommunikation: Eine Begriffs und Prozessanalyse* [Communication: Terms and Process Analysis]). Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1977).